

Richard Mandelbaum, CATA
NOSB Testimony
February 9, 1999

Thank you for this opportunity to be here. My name is Richard Mandelbaum; as I said during introductions, I am a NOFA-NJ certified organic grower, but I speak to you today in my capacity as an employee of CATA / the Farmworker Support Committee, a member organization of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture. We are a non-profit membership based organization, working with farmworkers in southern New Jersey, eastern Pennsylvania, and Puerto Rico. Our Board of Directors is comprised of people from the farmworker community. I explain all this because I want it to be clear that I am not here speaking as an individual but as a spokesperson for the community that makes up our membership.

I would like to speak briefly on the issue of social criteria in organic standards. CATA, through our executive director, participated in the USDA's Small Farms Commission, which among its many findings concluded that past and current agricultural labor policies have served as an effective subsidy for large scale, corporate modeled agriculture, at the expense of smaller and more sustainable farms. This inadequacy of current legal protections for workers and enforcement of these protections led the Commission to recommend that the USDA work toward "just and humane working conditions for all agricultural workers", which they explicitly noted refers to both farmers and farmworkers.

Now, what does this have to do with organic agriculture? We believe that a strong argument can be made that "just and humane working conditions" have historically been a fundamental component of organic agriculture, both in the management policies of growers and in the minds of consumers. Some evidence of this is the strong interest in this issue within the organic community. Therefore the addressing of this issue would not signify an addition to the definition of organic agriculture, but rather a solidification of what has always been an implicit component of organic agriculture. A more explicit expression of this can be seen in the IFOAM general principle that "social justice and social rights are an integral part of organic agriculture and processing", and the standards that follow, 10.1 and 10.2, that "the certification program shall ensure that operators have a policy on social justice", and "the certification program shall not certify production that is based on violations of basic human rights (in cases of clear social injustice)."

We are not requesting that the NOSB at this time formally address the development of such criteria. We fully recognize the complexity of this issue, as well as the timeline that the NOSB is on. There is an effort currently underway amongst ourselves and other members of the organic community to develop a proposal as to how this might be accomplished, all of which will include input and participation of producers and certifiers, as well as representatives of the farmworker community.

Thank you.